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On Our Light-Headed Readiness for War in Laos

In the Laotian crisis, Washington showed that light-headedness which has from time immemorial marked our human species on the verge of war. One newspaper headline epitomized the mood, "Kennedy Loses in Pay Fight, Hailed on Laos." A coalition of conservatives mustered a one-vote margin to win a haggle with the President over how many miserably paid workers should get an extra ten cents on their minimum wage. But the same cautious souls were ready to throw their lives and fortunes into the crucible over a country few could locate on the map. Despite the hand-wringing just a few years back over the warning of Sputnik, the President will have serious difficulty in getting a program through to step up our educational system in competition with the Russians. But nobody rose to question the wisdom of squandering hundreds of millions more on a futile jungle war that can lead nowhere but to frustration or a wider conflict. The wiser heads of the capital rushed forward to demonstrate that they were not to be outmatched in thoughtlessness. Chairman Fulbright of Senate Foreign Relations told a television audience "This is an example of where we ought to support the President whether we agree or not"—apparently on the principle that free debate were best suspended when most needed. And Senator Javits of New York said U.S. ground forces should fight if necessary "to save the people of Laos from being enslaved," a remark which would puzzle most Laotians. While dispatches from Vientiane reported (*New York Herald-Tribune,* March 25) that "not more than 100 Laotians had even heard of President Kennedy's address" and the Laotian capital was "sleeping off a riotous celebration", our press, radio and TV were whooping up the war fever. The calm in Laos illustrated the advantages of not possessing modern means of communication, especially since these show themselves most efficient in transmitting panic and engendering folly.

Strange Ways of the Inscrutable Occident

On a more sophisticated level, and in the inner councils of the government, there was general agreement that this talk of war was nonsense, a bluff the White House and the Pentagon were hoping the Russians would not call. The basic consideration, however, was to risk intervention—or seem to—if necessary to cover with big talk a diplomatic defeat. Mr. Kennedy, far abler than his predecessor and more than all else a cautious man, understands that he is the heir to a mess in Laos which we have ourselves created. He is sincere in saying we will accept a neutral Laos. And as the internal situation deteriorates we are belatedly prepared to accept recall of the International Control Commission, a 14-nation conference including Communist China and even the return to power of the neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma whom our military and our State Department people have twice, in 1958 and in 1960, toppled from office. All we ask is a little face-saver in the form of an immediate cease-fire, explicit or tacit. Unfortunately at the same time, as this is written, we are trying to line up the SEATO powers in Bangkok for a strong pronunciamento which would make it look as if the Russians were backing down to a military threat, a most unwise tactic as Prince Souvanna Phouma was quick to point out from Paris. If face must be saved (such are the inscrutable ways of us Occidentals) it must be saved on both sides.

Our position in Laos is weak from many points of view. Morally, we are guilty of violating the Geneva accords of 1954 by military and political intervention to upset the neutrality those accords were intended to protect; the very fact that our military must operate there in civilian clothes as a "Program Evaluations Office" testifies to the illicit character of the operation. Politically, our Ambassador J. Graham Parsons (later promoted to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, now awaiting transfer to Sweden as Ambassador but still influential in our councils on Laos) has been pursuing policies which have over and over again proven themselves bankrupt. These were designed to install a militantly anti-Communist dictatorship in Laos prepared to line itself up with SEATO. The most striking evidence of failure came last summer when a Captain Kong Le, commander of the crack parachutists who were the only pride and joy of our military in Laos, revolted (in disgust with the corruption we created) and put Souvanna Phouma back in power, Militarily, our threat of intervention is weak because all it would do is bog down U.S. forces in a mountain jungle

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As Seen By Americans On The Spot

"Said an American soldier—one of the hundred odd here in mufti to train Laotian military forces: 'We should be proud of ourselves. We have taught them [the Laotians] how to kill each other. Pretty soon they'll do it as well as civilized nations do. . . .'

"Said a member of the U.S. Operations Mission which along with the military has spent some $300,000,000 to aid Laos: 'I'm new here. But why is it that in every country I go to, the other side seems to have the will to fight while we do not. . . .'

'The [American] diplomat said: 'We came here to help out. . . . We were determined to be generous. But we gave the money and the goods to the military program. We neglected the economic side. And the money we did give to help the country went into the pockets of the rich and corrupt."

—New York Herald Tribune, from Laos, March 25

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Un-American Chairman's Ideological Premises Closer to Lenin's Than to Jefferson's

Walter Challenges Kennedy's Order Ending Controls on Incoming Literature

Three days before President Kennedy issued his order ending the practice of intercepting incoming books and newspapers from the Soviet bloc, Chairman Walter of the Un-American Activities Committee paid a visit to the White House. The purpose of the visit was never disclosed but four days after the President's order was issued, Mr. Walter introduced a bill, HR 5751, setting up an Office of the Comptroller of Foreign Propaganda in the Treasury's Customs Bureau. The bill would reinstate the practice Mr. Kennedy had just ended.

Mr. Walter, in a statement which accompanied the introduction of the bill, referred to the President's order when he said "Now that the Executive branch of the Government has found it necessary to discontinue the Government's practice of intercepting Communist propaganda, mailed into this country from abroad, the poison will be pouring into the veins of our society without restriction." The bill is an amendment to the Subversive Activities Control Act and it was referred to the Committee on Un-American Activities. We hope liberal organizations will demand hearings.

The State As Nursemaid

The ideology behind this bill is that of the Soviet rather than of the American system. Behind this legislation are two old ideas. One is that the State must play nursemaid to the people and protect them from dangerous thoughts. The other is that subversive ideas have a supernatural power, akin to some noxious poison which cannot be combatted by normal debate.

The very language used by Mr. Walter is strikingly like that which has been utilized to defend censorship within the Soviet Union in the past.* Thus Lunacharsky, Lenin's Minister of Education, declared early in 1921, "We in no way shrink from the necessity of applying censorship even to belles-lettres, since under this banner and beneath this elegant exterior poison may be implanted in the still naive and dark soul of the great mass of people. . . ." And the late Andrei Vishinsky in his *The Law of the Soviet State* attacked "the liberal screen of 'free press' " as a freedom "to poison the minds of the masses." They, like Mr. Walter, believe the State has a duty to protect people from these "poisons"; they by censorship; he by labeling and import control.

We'd like to see battle joined on the issue, and Mr. Walter put on the defensive. His attitude is far closer to Lenin's than to Jefferson's. Hearings on this thought control measure would be an opportunity to expose the strange ideas which pass for Americanism in his committee. It has too long been able to operate unchallenged as the citadel of a police state mentality more truly un-American than anything it has hunted.

***We applaud the abolition of censorship on outgoing newspaper dispatches from the Soviet Union. We are talking here of the steps taken by the USSR to control literature within the Union and to prevent foreign papers and books from entering Russia, as Mr. Walter would like to keep them from entering the U.S.A.**

Mistaken Identity Case

The Supreme Court last Monday granted certiorari in the appeal of Robert Shelton, a copy editor of the New York Times, from a conviction for contempt of the Senate Internal Security Committee. There is reason for believing that Mr. Shelton's conviction may be reversed. This arises from the emphasis placed by Mr. Justice Stewart in the Wilkinson decision on the fact that Mr. Wilkinson had not been summoned "as the result of an indiscriminate dragnet procedure, lacking in probable cause for belief that he possessed information which might be helpful to the subcommittee." The Court seemed to be saying that, just as an arrest is not legal without "probable cause", so a committee subpoena was not valid if there was not some reason to believe the witness had information on the subject under investigation. Mr. Shelton's case — a First Amendment contempt — is peculiar in that the Internal Security Committee had a subpoena for another newspaperman of the same last name who does not work for the New York Times, and changed the subpoena to fit when Senator Eastland learned there was another Shelton on the paper named Robert. The petition to the Supreme Court asked whether a witness could be punished for contempt when subpoenaed "without probable cause or any reason to believe" that he had ever been affiliated with Communists or had any knowledge of their activities.

House Un-American's Ranking Republican, Scherer, Endorses John Birch Society

Unnoticed by the press, the name of Rep. Gordon H. Scherer of Ohio, ranking Republican member of the House Un-American Activities Committee appears in a list of prominent persons endorsing the John Birch Society, a secret order of right wing crackpots led by a retired business man Fuehrer named Robert Welch. The list was put into the Congressional Record March 22 (p. 4335) as part of a speech by Rep. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, defending the society and calling for the impeachment of Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Society's No. 1 project.

The speech was headed, "Earl Warren's Fellow Travellers Smear John Birch Society" and it said the attack on the Society carried by Time (March 10) was "amazingly similar" to one that appeared earlier in People's World (Feb. 25), which "as verified by the research staff of the Senate Internal Security Committee, is the official organ of the Communist Party on the West Coast." Mr. Rivers thought this odd in "a magazine like Time, which purports to expose and attack communism. . . ."

The "amazing similarity" cited by Rivers is that both publications picked out the names of Dean Clarence Manion, Spruille Braden and Adolphe Menjou on the Council of the Birch Society. Mr. Rivers did not question the originality of Time's characterization of the Society: "Its cells, of 20 to 30 members apiece . . . promote Communist-style front organizations that do not use the John Birch name. Carefully avoiding normal channels of political action, the society accepts the hard-boiled dictatorial direction of one man who sees democracy as a 'perennial fraud' and estimates the U.S. is 40% to 60% Communist-controlled."

Last week we published the text of a letter signed by Senator Eastland for the Internal Security Committee calling the John Birch Society a "patriotic" organization. Now it turns out that Mr. Scherer of the Un-Americans is an endorser. These self-anointed guardians of Americanism pure and undefiled keep strange company.

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JFK In Boosting the Defense Budget Calls Military Spending A Form of Insurance

Does the Arms Race Insure Anything But A Growing Mutual Insecurity?

All through the President's special message on the defense budget last week ran the theme that money spent on arms was like money spent on insurance. This is a deceptive metaphor.

A man buys insurance in order to protect his wife and children, knowing that he will some day die. The arms race is not insurance against death, but against a neighbor one does not trust. You assume that if you let him know you carry a revolver, he will not dare to attack you. This is the theory of deterrence in its simplest form.

The trouble with arms race *insurance* is that both sides take it out against each other. Each neighbor regards the other as untrustworthy and himself, of course, as a sterling fellow. To deter him you have to have more firepower than he does. If he has a revolver, you buy a shotgun. If he sees you have a shotgun, he puts metal guards around his windows. To meet this obstacle to swift and sure deterrence, you put in a stock of hand grenades. He may counter this with a small second hand cannon aimed at your bedroom window.

Second Strike Capacity

To meet the threat of that cannon aimed at your bedroom window, you decide to put in some second strike capacity. You aim an automatic machine gun into his nursery, and wire it to go off when and if he lets fly into your bedroom. He will then know that though he may kill you and your wife in your sleep, his children will die with you.

Put in these terms, it is easy to see that the one kind of insurance this provides is insurance that neither side will sleep easily at nights.

This problem is soluble only when looked at not from the viewpoint of any one household but of all of them. We meet the problem in community living by forbidding private armament and allowing firepower only to the police.

So long as we fail to apply this same approach to the world community, the arms race only supplies an increasing insecurity. Thus Mr. Kennedy, in stepping up the Polaris program, calls for 29 nuclear submarines "each with a full complement of missiles." He says, "The sooner they are on station, the safer we will be."

Each Polaris submarine has 16 nuclear missiles. If our arithmetic is correct, 29 submarines will carry a total of 524 missiles. When the Russians know we have 524 nuclear missiles cocked at their cities and bases from secret places under the sea, will we really be safer?

The Origin of Those Missile And Bomber Gap Scares

"There is no doubt that the services have sometimes utilized inflated estimates of enemy strengths to strengthen their budget requests to Congress. There have been marked differences of opinion between the services based on differing intelligence estimates—about Soviet missile strength, and, some years ago, about Soviet bomber strength. Each service has a natural tendency to stress those elements of Soviet strength with which it is most concerned."

—Hanson W. Baldwin, New York Times, March 27

The Russians certainly won't feel safer. Their answer will be to build nuclear submarines of their own and ring *our* shores with them. When both sides are ringed by secret submarines armed with enough missiles to wipe out every city and small town in both, will we feel safer? Or will we be looking around for some new super-monster to pile on top of all the existing monsters we call instruments of deterrence? Can either side really be made safer by rendering the other side more insecure?

Mr. Kennedy says, and we are sure he is sincere, that "the primary purpose of our arms is peace, not war." But this is what men have always said. "If you want peace, prepare for war" is one of the oldest fallacies of mankind. The President is objective enough to note that "in the public position of both sides in recent years, the determination to be strong has been coupled with announced willingness to negotiate. For our part," Mr. Kennedy added, "we know there can be dialectical truth in such a position, and we shall do all we can to prove it in action." The trouble is that both sides want to deal from a situation of strength, and neither is yet willing to put the job of policing the world in the hands of a world community. There is no other way out.

To step up the arms race, as Mr. Kennedy is doing with this new message, merely adds to the tempo of madness. We began by ringing the Soviet Union with bases to contain it. The Soviets replied by developing an intercontinental ballistic missile which can hurl death on our cities in 30 minutes. We counter by putting nuclear armed submarines in secret position around the Soviet shores. The USSR may reply next by putting nuclear weapons in orbit on space ships whirling around the earth, ready on signal to hurl death down upon it. The notion of deterrence on which both sides operate is a delusion. It leads to a dead end for mankind.

Only Solution We Can See Is To Plan for War Against Other Planets

"Los Angeles, Mar. 27—(AP)—By 1965 the United States expects to have: 708 Atlas, Titan and Minuteman ICBM's, most of them stored in bomb-proof pits; 236 Polaris missiles in nuclear submarines and 150 additional Minutemen on trains roving 100,000 miles of railroad tracks, hard to spot and harder to hit.

"Total: 1,094 ready-to-launch nuclear warheads, any one of which could wipe out a city. This is probably two or three times the fire-power needed to blast any likely combination of enemies off the face of the globe. Even if Russia by 1965 has a reasonably good anti-missile missile, with this overkill of 200 to 300 percent the United States should be able to get enough missiles through to make any future war a literal hell.

"So in 1965 will we need more missiles? If we don't, what happens to America's vast missile industry? The industry last year grossed $6 billion and gave jobs to 300,000 people. By 1965, if future growth matches past performance, it could begin to rival the $12 billion, 700,000-worker automobile industry.

"Any serious dislocation of this industry would have a depressing economic effect. . . . A survey of missile executives indicates full awareness of the problem."

—New York Herald-Tribune, March 28

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It Was Not Lack of Military Means Which Caused Our Failure in Laos

(Continued from Page One)

country to repeat all the agonies of the French in the bloody years before 1954. In addition, and here the maps shown by Mr. Kennedy at his White House press conference gave a false picture, it is not true that the Pathet Lao and Captain Kong Le merely hold three northern provinces; if that were true, the situation could be contained by a military line or by partition. The true situation may be seen in the map published by *Le Monde* in Paris (March 25) which shows that except for the Mekong River valley lowlands which adjoin Thailand, all the rest of the country from north to south is now "infected" with guerrillas. They hold the mountain uplands. According to a series of three articles by that paper's Far Eastern expert, Robert Guillain, by far the best on-the-spot report I have seen (March 24, 25 & 26-27), all the east-west routes are controlled by the Pathet Lao; they are in position to cut the country in half at Thakek. There is no longer a line which can be held.

The Same Old Errors

The Laos crisis deepens one's disappointment with the President's special message adding some $2 billions to our defense budget, boosting both the monsters of massive retaliation (see p. 3) and also means for limited war. Though Mr. Kennedy's requests are much less than the arms lobby had been led to expect from the Democrats, they illustrate that the line of least resistance in our society when faced with a crisis is to step up our military appropriations. But our policies in Laos did not collapse for any caution in military spending. Their failure grew out of our inability to understand social and economic factors. In the six years since the Geneva accords we have created viable regimes neither in Laos nor South Vietnam; only neutralist Cambodia is stable. We have built up huge armies in Thailand, Formosa, the Philippines and these two Indochinese satellites which either lack the will to fight or are geared in any case to large scale modern war against Communist China. They have neither the equipment, the training nor the political program to do battle in the countryside. In both Laos and South Vietnam, in addition, mistreatment of the large racial minorities in the mountains by the dominant lowlander Lao and Viets have given the Communist guerrillas friendly terrain in which to operate.

To win the people by fair treatment—is this so difficult a principle to understand in a country constantly striving at home by democratic means to improve economic security and minority rights? Unfortunately the military and diplomatic bureaucracies by tradition and training have little taste or sympathy for democratic policies, and these make or distort policy in the act of carrying it out. So inextinguishable a military windbag as Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, Chief of Naval Operations, made another of his speeches in the midst of the Laotian crisis and declared "U.S. military power must be prepared to safeguard our principles whenever, wherever they may be theatened." (*N.Y. Herald-Tribune*, March 26.) But what moral right do we have to impose "our principles" by blood and fire on a distant peaceful people anyway? And just what did American principles have to do with the conniving grafters we tried to impose on Laos?

Some British Views of Laos

"There have been many defects in past American policy, including the support of unrepresentative right-wing figures."

—London Times, from Bangkok, March 27

"British official opinion does not share the view commonly reported from Washington that in Laos Mr. Khrushchov is simply engaged in a reckless piece of brinkmanship to test the nerve of the new American President and of the West as a whole. It is too well aware of the fact that the Laotian civil war is partly the result of rash American diplomacy under the Eisenhower Administration, a result about which Britain and France gave repeated warnings."

—Diplomatic Corresp., London Observer, Mar. 26

"He [Prince Souvanna Phouma "the most considerable of the Laotian politicians"] was defeated in 1958 [in his effort to build a neutral Laos] not by the Communists but by the Laotian right wing, with army support and American encouragement. A right wing government took over, and the international control commission was got rid of as being too neutral. The integration of the Pathet Lao troops and of the northern provinces failed. An American military mission arrived, and American aid poured in."

—Scrutator in London Sunday Times, March 26

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